

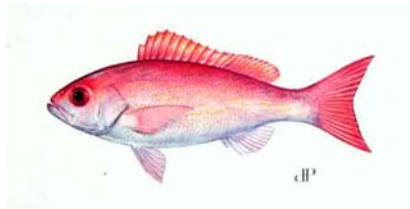
# Snapper and Grouper Management in South Atlantic Federal Waters

## Amendment 16

### Vermillion Snapper, Gag, Black Grouper, and Red Grouper

#### Frequently Asked Questions

*December 2008*



#### **Amendment 16 – Long-term Management Measures**

##### **Why are additional management measures being proposed for vermillion snapper, gag, black grouper, and red grouper in the South Atlantic?**

- Vermillion snapper, gag, black grouper, and red grouper are undergoing overfishing. Overfishing means that fish are being harvested from a particular stock at too high of a rate.
- Thus, a reduction in harvest from the commercial and recreational sectors is needed to end overfishing for these species.

##### **What is Amendment 16 to the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for the South Atlantic Snapper Grouper Fishery?**

- The amendment identifies the preferred management measures identified by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) as the measures needed to address overfishing in vermillion snapper, gag, red grouper, and black grouper.
- The Council approved Amendment 16 during its meeting in Charleston, SC the week of September 15, 2008, and submitted the amendment to NOAA Fisheries Service for review.

##### **Why include management measures for all the shallow water grouper species rather than just gag?**

- Red grouper and black grouper are also experiencing overfishing and the overfishing status of rock hind, red hind, coney, graysby, yellowmouth grouper, yellowfin grouper, and tiger grouper is unknown.
- Therefore, the intent of Amendment 16 is to improve the status of all shallow-water grouper species, some of which are taken incidentally when targeting gag and vermillion snapper.

**What species are included in the South Atlantic shallow-water grouper complex?**

- Black grouper, red grouper scamp, red hind, rock hind, yellowmouth grouper, tiger grouper, yellowfin grouper, graysby, and coney.

**What would Amendment 16 do if approved by NOAA Fisheries Service?**

This amendment would:

- Implement measures to address overfishing of gag, vermilion snapper, red grouper, and black grouper;
- Allow the Regional Administrator to adjust management measures pending the outcome of a new benchmark stock assessment for vermilion snapper;
- Specify the total allowable catch and define interim allocations for gag and vermilion snapper;
- Update management reference points for gag and vermilion snapper; and
- Reduce bycatch of snapper grouper species by requiring the use of venting tools and de-hooking devices (as needed) for a person on board a vessel to fish for snapper-grouper species in the South Atlantic EEZ.

**What is the reduction in harvest being proposed for gag?**

- The Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) recommended that the reduction in harvest be set at a lower level than what would simply end overfishing. The recommendation will increase the probability that overfishing does not occur, which is mandated by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Reauthorization Act of 2006 (Magnuson-Stevens Reauthorization Act).
- Thus, the recommendation represents a 35% reduction in the average commercial and recreational landings from 2004-2006.

**Why is a four-month commercial and recreational closure being proposed for gag and the shallow-water grouper species?**

- Gag and other shallow-water grouper species are vulnerable to overfishing because they change sex, many are long lived, and some species (e.g. gag, black grouper, scamp, red hind, and tiger grouper) are known to form spawning aggregations at locations known to fishermen.
- Therefore, extending the spawning season closure for just gag and black grouper to other shallow water groupers could have positive biological effects including protecting spawning aggregations, increasing the percentage of males, enhancing reproductive success, and increasing the magnitude of recruitment.
- Gag and other shallow-water grouper species (black grouper, red grouper, scamp, red hind, rock hind, yellowmouth grouper, tiger grouper, yellowfin grouper, graysby, and coney) spawn during January-April.

**What is the Council's preferred allocation alternative for gag and what is the rationale for setting it at this level?**

- The Council's preferred alternative would allocate 51% of the total allowable catch to the commercial sector and 49% to the recreational sector.
- This is based on landings data from 1999-2003 and is closest to the September 2007 Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel's (AP) recommendation for a 50/50 allocation.
- The AP examined the allocation tables and noted the distribution of catch was about 50/50 in recent years and they felt this was fair among the two sectors.

**Why are management measures for vermilion snapper included in Amendment 16 when the new benchmark stock assessment had not been completed?**

- The Council was notified in June 2007 that vermilion snapper is experiencing overfishing; therefore, the Council is legally obligated to develop a plan to end overfishing within one year.
- Since efforts to reassess vermilion snapper are proceeding, NOAA Fisheries Service would have the opportunity to review the new assessment results prior to implementing any vermilion snapper regulations proposed by the Council to address the June 2007 overfishing notification.
- In order to proceed with an amendment, while recognizing the new assessment may alter the type of actions required to end overfishing, the Council has developed scenarios that would allow the NOAA Fisheries Service Regional Administrator to alter current management measures, as per the Council's instruction outlined in this amendment, if the assessment results require a harvest reduction different from that proposed in Amendment 16.
- The assessment has since been completed and management measures for vermilion snapper were chosen by the Regional Administrator at the Council's December 2008 meeting. The proposed vermilion management measures include: A directed commercial quota of 315,523 lbs. gutted weight from January through June; a directed commercial quota of 302,523 lbs. gutted weight from July through December; a five fish bag limit, and a recreational closure from November through March.

**What is the preferred allocation alternative for vermilion snapper and what is the rationale for setting it at this level?**

- The Council's preferred alternative would allocate 68% of the total allowable catch to the commercial sector and 32% to the recreational sector.
- The Council examined the complete time series for landings data and noticed little fluctuation in the commercial and recreational landings over time. The proposed allocation reflects this continuous landings trend.

**Why is red snapper not included Amendment 16?**

- The Council considered the possibility of including red snapper in Amendment 16; however, an addendum to the red snapper assessment has just been completed.
- The Council discussed management measures needed to end overfishing of red snapper at their December 2008 meeting.
- Management measures for red snapper will be included in Amendment 17.

**Will there be additional opportunities to comment on Amendment 16?**

- Yes, the public will have the opportunity to comment on Amendment 16 and the associated Environmental Impact Statement.
- The public will be informed about these comment periods through a Fishery Bulletin and information on our Web site.

**Where can I find a copy of Amendment 16?**

- The most recent draft of Amendment 16 can be found on the Council's Web site at <http://www.safmc.net/Library/SnapperGrouper/tabid/415/Default.aspx>